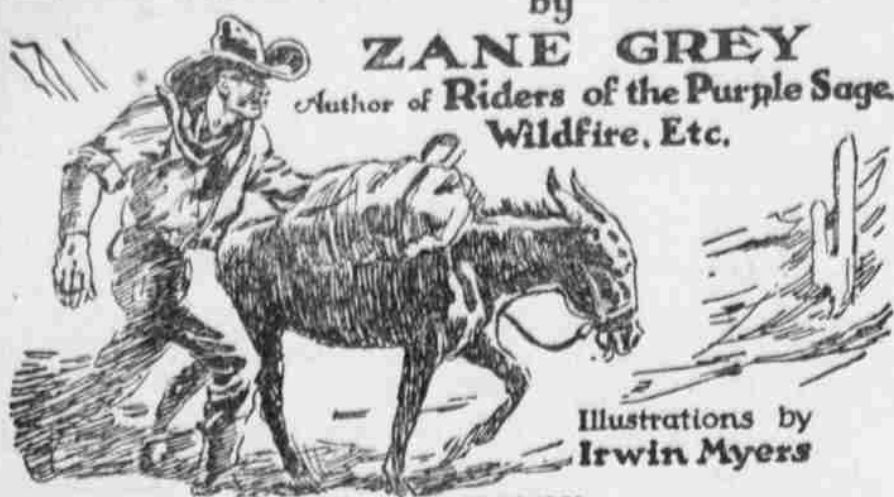


DESERT GOLD

by
ZANE GREY
Author of *Riders of the Purple Sage*,
Wildfire, Etc.



Illustrations by
Irwin Myers

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Chapter VIII Continued

"Shore I appreciate it, Dick. I know how you care for that horse. I guess mebbe Charley Ladd has loved a horse! An' one not so good as Sol. I was only tryin' your nerve, Dick, askin' you without tellin' my plan. Sol won't get a scratch, you can gamble on that! I'll ride him down into the valley an' pull the Greasers out into the open. They've got short-ranged carbines. They can't get out of range of the 405, an' I'll be takin' the dust of their lead. They can't gain on Sol, an' he'll run them down when I want. Can you beat it?"

"No. It's great! . . . But suppose a raider comes out on Blanco Diablo?"

"I reckon that's the one weak place in my plan. But if they do, well, Sol can outrun Diablo. An' I can always kill the white devil!"

Ladd's strange hate of the horse showed in the passion of his last words, in his hardening jaw and grim set lips.

Gale's hand went swiftly to the raider's shoulder.

"Laddy. Don't kill Diablo unless it's to save your life."

"All right. But by G—d, if I get a chance I'll make Blanco Sol run him off his legs!"

He spoke no more and set about changing the length of Sol's stirrups. When he had them adjusted to suit, he mounted and rode down the trail and out upon the level. He rode leisurely as if merely going to water his horse. The long black rifle lying across his saddle, however, was ominous.

Gale securely tied the other horse to a mesquite at hand, and took a position behind a low rock over which he could easily see and shoot when necessary. Ladd rode a quarter of a mile out upon the flat before anything happened. Then a whistle rent the still, cold air. A horse had been seen or scented Blanco Sol. The whistle was prolonged, faint, but clear. It made the blood thrum in Gale's ears. Sol halted. His head shot up with the old, wild, spirited sweep. Gale leveled his glass at the patch of mesquites. He saw the riders running to an open place, pointing, gesticulating. Then he got only white and dark gleams of moving bodies. Evidently that moment was one of boots, guns and saddles for the raiders.

Then Gale saw a rider gallop swiftly from the group toward the farther outlet of the valley. This might have been owing to characteristic cowardice; but it was more likely a move of the raiders to make sure of retreat. Undoubtedly Ladd saw this galloping horseman. A few waiting moments ensued. The galloping horseman reached the slope, began to climb. With naked eyes Gale saw a puff of white smoke spring out of the rocks. Then the raider wheeled his plunging horse back to the level, and went racing wildly down the valley.

The compact bunch of bays and blacks seemed to break apart and spread rapidly from the edge of the mesquites. Puffs of white smoke indicated firing, and showed the nature of the raiders' excitement. They were far out of ordinary range; but they spurred toward Ladd, shooting as they rode. The raiders' bullets, striking low, were skipping along the hard, bare floor of the valley. Then Ladd raised the long rifle. There was no smoke, but three high, spanging reports rang out. A gap opened in the dark line of advancing horsemen; then a riderless steed sheered off to the right. Blanco Sol seemed to turn as on a pivot and charged back toward the lower end of the valley. He circled over to Gale's right and stretched out into his run. There were now five raiders in pursuit, and they came sweeping down, yelling and shooting, evidently sure of their quarry. Ladd reserved his fire. He kept turning from back to front in his saddle.

Manifestly he intended to try to lead the raiders round in front of Gale's position, and, presently, Gale saw he was going to succeed. The raiders, riding like vaqueros, swept on in a curve, cutting off what distance they could. Blanco Sol pounded by, his rapid, rhythmic hoofbeats plainly to be heard. He was running easily.

Gale tried to still the jump of heart and pulse, and turned his eye again on the nearest pursuer. This raider was crossing in, his carbine held muzzle up in his right hand, and he was coming swiftly. It was a long shot, upward of five hundred yards. Gale had not time to adjust the sights of the Remington, but he knew the gun and, holding coarsely upon the swiftly moving blot, he began to shoot. The rifle was automatic; Gale needed only to pull the trigger. Swiftly he worked it. Suddenly the leading

horse leaped convulsively, not up nor aside, but straight ahead, and then he crashed to the ground, throwing his rider like a catapult, and then slid and rolled. He half got up, fell back, and kicked; but his rider never moved.

The other raiders saw the reins of plunging steeds and whirled to escape the unseen battery. Gale slipped a fresh clip into the magazine of his rifle. He restrained himself from useless firing and gave eager eye to the duel below. Ladd began to shoot while Sol was running. The 405 rang out sharply—then again. The heavy bullets streaked the dust all the way across the valley. The raiders spurred madly in pursuit, loading and firing. They shot ten times while Ladd shot once, and all in vain; and on Ladd's sixth shot a raider toppled backward, threw his carbine and fell with his foot catching in a stirrup. The frightened horse plunged away, dragging him in a path of dust.

Ladd had emptied a magazine, and now Blanco Sol quickened and lengthened his running stride. He ran away from his pursuers. Then it was that the raider's ruse was divined by the raiders. They halted sharply up and seemed to be conferring. But that was a fatal mistake. Blanco Sol was seen to break his gait and slow down in several jumps, then square away and stand stockstill. Ladd fired at the closely grouped raiders. An instant passed. Then Gale heard the spat of a bullet out in front, saw a puff of dust, then heard the lead strike the rocks and go whining away. And it was after this that one of the raiders fell prone from his saddle. The steel-jacketed 405 had gone through him on its uninterrupted way to hum past Gale's position.

The remaining two raiders frantically spurred their horses and fled up the valley. Ladd sent Sol after them. The raiders split, one making for the eastern outlet, the other circling back of the mesquites. Ladd kept on after the latter. Then puffs of white smoke and rifle shots faintly crackling told of Jim Lash's hand in the game. However, he succeeded only in driving the raider back into the valley. But Ladd had turned the other horseman, and now it appeared the two raiders were between Lash above on the stony slope and Ladd below on the level. There was desperate riding on part of the raiders to keep from being

hemmed in closer. Only one of them got away, and he came riding for life down under the eastern wall. Blanco Sol settled into his graceful, beautiful swing. He gained steadily, though he was far from extending himself.

Some few hundred rods to the left of Gale the raider put his horse to the weathered slope. He began to climb. Zigzag they went up and up, and when Ladd reached the edge of the slope they were high along the cracked and guttered rampart. Once—twice Ladd raised the long rifle, but each time he lowered it. Gale divined that the raider's restraint was not on account of the Mexican, but for that valiant and faithful horse. Up and up he went, and the yellow dust clouds rose, and an avalanche rolled rattling and cracking down the slope. It was be-



Only One of Them Got Away, and He Came Riding for Life Down Under the Eastern Wall.

yond belief that a horse, burdened or unburdened, could find footing and hold it upon that wall of narrow ledges and inverted, slanting gullies. But he climbed on, sure-footed as a mountain goat, and, surmounting the last rough steps, he stood a moment

silhouetted against the white sky. Then he disappeared. Ladd sat astride Blanco Sol gazing upward. How the cowboy must have honored that raider's brave deed!

Gale, who had been too dumb to shout the admiration he felt, suddenly leaped up, and his voice came with a shriek:

"Look out, Laddy!"

A big horse, like a white streak, was bearing down to the right of the raider. Blanco Diablo! A matchless rider swung with the horse's motion. Gale was stunned. Then he remembered the first raider, the one Lash had shot at and driven away from the outlet. This fellow had made for the mesquite and had put a saddle on Belding's favorite. In the heat of the excitement, while Ladd had been intent upon the climbing horse, this last raider had come down with the speed of the wind straight for the western outlet. Perhaps, very probably, he did not know Gale was there to block it; and certainly he hoped to pass Ladd and Blanco Sol.

A touch of the spur made Sol lunge forward to head off the raider. Diablo was in his stride, but the distance and angle favored Sol. The raider had no carbine. He held aloft a gun ready to level it and fire. He sat the saddle as if it were a stationary seat. Gale saw Ladd lean down and drop the 405 in the sand. He would take no chances of wounding Belding's best-loved horse.

Then Gale sat transfixed with suspended breath watching the horses thundering toward him. Blanco Diablo was speeding low, fleet as an antelope, fierce and terrible in his devilish action, a horse for war and blood and death. He seemed unbeatable. Yet to see the magnificently running Blanco Sol was but to court a doubt. Plain it was the raider could not make the opening ahead of Ladd. He saw it and swerved to the left, emptying his six-shooter as he turned.

Blanco Sol thundered across. Then the race became straight away up the valley. It was a fleet, beautiful, magnificent race. Gale thrilled and exulted and yelled as his horse settled into a steadily swifter run and began to gain.

The gap between Diablo and Sol narrowed yard by yard. All the devil that was in Blanco Diablo had its running on the downward stretch. The strange, cruel urge of bit and spur, the crazed rider who stuck like a burr upon him, the shots and smoke added terror to his natural violent temper. He ran himself off his feet. But he could not elude that relentless horse behind him.

Then, like one white flash following another, the two horses gleamed down the bank of a wash and disappeared in clouds of dust.

Gale watched with strained and smarting eyes. The thick throb in his ears was pierced by faint sounds of gunshots. Then he waited in almost unendurable suspense.

Suddenly something whiter than the background of dust appeared above the low roll of valley floor. Gale leveled his glass. In the clear circle shone Blanco Sol's noble head with its long black bar from ears to nose. Sol's head was drooping now. Another second showed Ladd still in the saddle. The raider was leading Blanco Diablo—spent—broken—dragging—riderless.

CHAPTER IX

An Interrupted Siesta.

No man ever had a more eloquent and beautiful pleader for his cause than had Dick Gale in Mercedes Castaneda. Nell lay in the hammock, her hands behind her head, with rosy cheeks and arch eyes. Indeed she looked rebellious.

Dick was inclined to be rebellious himself. Belding had kept the raiders in off the line, and therefore Dick had been idle most of the time, and, though he tried hard, he had been unable to stay far from Nell's vicinity. He believed she cared for him; but he could not catch her alone long enough to verify his tormenting hope. He had long before enlisted the loyal Mercedes in his cause; but in spite of this Nell had been more than a match for them both.

Gale pondered over an idea he had long revolved in mind, and which now suddenly gave place to a decision that made his heart swell and his cheek burn. He went in search of Mrs. Belding, and found her busy in the kitchen.

The relation between Gale and Mrs. Belding had subtly and incomprehensibly changed. He understood her less than when at first he divined an antagonism in her. If such a thing were possible she had retained the antagonism while seeming to yield to some influence that must have been fondness for him. Gale had come to care greatly for Nell's mother. Not only was she the comfort and strength of her home, but also of the inhabitants of Fortoria River. Indian, Mexican, American were all the same to her in trouble or illness; and then she was nurse, doctor, peacemaker, helper. She was good and noble, and there was not a child or grownup in Fortoria River who did not love and bless her. But Mrs. Belding did not seem happy. She seldom smiled, and never laughed. There was always a soft, sad, hurt look in her eyes. Gale often wondered if there had been other tragedy in her life than the supposed loss of her father in the desert.

Mrs. Belding heard Dick's step as he entered the kitchen, and, looking up, greeted him.

"Mother," began Dick, earnestly. Belding called her that, and so did Ladd and Lash, but it was the first time for Dick. "Mother—I want to speak to you."

The only indication Mrs. Belding gave of being startled was in her eyes, which darkened, shadowed with multiplying thought.

"I love Nell," went on Dick, simply, "and I want you to let me ask her to be my wife."

Mrs. Belding's face blanched to a deathly white. Gale, thinking with surprise and concern that she was going to faint, moved quickly toward her, took her arm.

"Forgive me. I was blunt. . . . But I thought you knew."

"I've known for a long time," replied Mrs. Belding. Her voice was steady, and there was no evidence of agitation except in her pallor. "Then you haven't spoken to Nell?"

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AUCTION OF SCHOOL LANDS

Notice is hereby given that on the 2nd day of January 1923 at one o'clock P. M. at the office of the county treasurer of Lincoln county, the Commissioner of Public Lands and Buildings, or his authorized representative, will offer for lease at public auction all educational lands within said county upon which forfeiture of contract has been declared or lease contract has expired.

All sec. 16-12-26
NW¼, SE¼, sec. 36-12-26
All sec. 16-16-26
All sec. 16-10-27
All sec. 36-10-27
E½ sec. 36-11-27
All sec. 16-16-27
All sec. 36-10-23
W½, SE¼, sec. 16-10-29
All sec. 36-10-29
All sec. 36-11-29
E½, N½NW¼, sec. 36-12-29
SW¼NW¼, SE¼, lot 2, 3 sec 36-13-29
S¼SE¼, sec. 16-16-29
NW¼, N½SW¼, sec. 36-16-29
N½NE¼, W½W½, sec 16-9-30
NW¼ sec 36-9-30
All sec. 16-10-30
NE¼ sec 16-11-30
S¼ sec. 36-12-30
NW¼ sec. 36-15-30
N½ sec. 36-16-30
All sec 16-9-31
All sec. 36-9-31
NE¼, W½NW¼, N½S½, SW¼SW¼, SE¼SE¼, sec. 16-12-31.
All sec. 36-13-31
All sec. 36-16-31
All sec 16-10-32
W½ sec. 36-13-32
W½NE¼, W½, W½SE¼, SE¼SE¼ sec 36-9-33.
SW¼ sec. 36-13-33
SE¼SW¼, SE¼, lots 2, 3, 4, 5, sec 8-14-33.
N½, N½SW¼, SE¼, sec. 16-14-33
All sec. 36-15-33
N½N½ sec. 16-16-33
All sec. 16-9-34
SW¼ sec. 16-10-34
All sec. 16-11-34
NE¼ sec. 16-13-34
N½N½, lots 2, 3, 4, sec. 14-14-34
December 8, 1922

DAN SWANSON, Commissioner of Public Lands and Buildings.

NOTICE OF FINAL REPORT

Estate No. 1893 of Rhoda A. Edmiston, deceased in the County Court of Lincoln County, Nebraska.

The State of Nebraska, to all persons interested in said Estate take notice that the Administrator has filed a final account and report of his administration and discharge as such Administrator, which have been set for hearing before said court on January 19th, 1923 at 10 o'clock a. m. when you may appear and contest the same.

Dated December 23rd, 1922.

WM. H. C. WOODHURST

County Judge

J. C. Hollman, Atty.

NOTICE OF PETITION

Estate No. 1923 of James V. Robinson, deceased in the County Court of Lincoln County, Nebraska.

The State of Nebraska, to all persons interested in said Estate take notice that a petition has been filed for the allowance to probate of the last will and testament of James V. Robinson, deceased and the appointment of Ada A. Robinson at Executrix of said Estate, which has been set for hearing herein on Jan. 16th, 1923 at 10 o'clock a. m.

Dated Dec. 23rd, 1922.

WM. H. C. WOODHURST

County Judge

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NOTICE OF TAKING UP ESTRAY

Taken up by undersigned Block 33 and 34, Neville addition, County of Lincoln, State of Nebraska; on the 19 day of November 1922, 1 black gelding, 2 years old; 1 dun colored gelding coming 2 years old; 1 gray mare coming 4 yrs. old. Unbroke and no brands.

Dated this 22 day of November 1922.

Signed Gene Crook.

EXTENSION ROAD NO. 37

To whom it may concern:

A consent petition presented to the board of county commissioners to locate a road commencing at the South-West corner of Section nine (9) and the Southeast corner of Section eight (8) Town Thirteen (13) Range Thirty four (34) to connect with road No. 213. All objections thereto or claims for damage must be filed in the County Clerk's office on or before noon on the 2nd day of January, A. D. 1923 or such road will be established without reference thereto.

Said road to be 66 feet wide.

A. S. ALLEN

County Clerk

EXTENSION ROAD NO. 247

To whom it may concern:

A consent petition presented to the board of county commissioners to locate a road commencing at the Southwest corner of Section 27, Township 14, North of Range 31 west of the 6th P. M. and running thence North on section line to the Union Pacific Railroad right-of-way. All objections thereto or claims for damage must be filed in the County Clerk's office on or before noon of the 2nd day of January A. D. 1923 or such road will be established without reference thereto.

Said road to be 66 feet wide.

A. S. ALLEN

County Clerk

NOTICE OF PAVING ASSESSMENT

Notice is hereby given that the City Council of the city of North Platte, Nebraska, will sit as a Board of Equalization on January 2nd, 1923 at 8 p. m., for the purpose of equalizing and assessing the cost of construction of pavement in Paving District No. 9, being West 4th Street and in Paving District No. 11, being West 9th Street, against the abutting property owners.

All those having objections to such equalization and assessment will be present at the council chamber on said date for the purpose of presenting to the council all objections.

Witness my hand this 19th day of December, 1922.

O. E. ELDER,

City Clerk.

VACATION OF ROADS NO. 120 & 161

To whom it may concern:

The commissioner appointed to vacate roads Number 120 and 161, Road No. 120 commencing on the section line between sections 8 and 9 Town 14, Range 33, thence in a Northeastly direction, parallel with the south bank of the North Platte river, and terminating on the section line between sections 9 and 10 Town 14 Range 33.

And Road No. 161, commencing on section line between Sections 9 and 10, Town 14, Range 33, thence running in a Southeasterly direction to the section line between sections 10 and 11 in Town 14, Range 33, West was reported in favor of the vacation thereof, and all objections thereto must be filed in the county clerk's office on or before noon on the 2nd day of January, 1923 or such roads will be vacated without reference thereto.

A. S. ALLEN

County Clerk

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NOTICE OF PETITION

Estate No. 1920 of Hattie M. Reckard, deceased in the County Court of Lincoln County, Nebraska.

The State of Nebraska. To all persons interested in said Estate take notice that a petition has been filed for the probating of the will filed and the appointment of E. H. Evans as executor of said estate, which has been set for hearing herein on January 2, 1923 at 10 o'clock a. m.

Dated December 9th, 1922.

WM. H. C. WOODHURST

County Judge.

EXTENSION TO ROAD NO. 418

To whom it may concern:

The special commissioner appointed to locate a public road as follows: Beginning at the Southeast corner of Section Twenty-nine and the Northeast corner of Section Thirty-two, township eleven and range thirty-two; thence running west one mile between sections twenty-nine and thirty-two, along said section line, thence South between Sections thirty-one and thirty-two to the South line of township eleven, thence south between sections five and six and seven and eight, seventeen and eighteen to the South line of Section Seventeen, thence east about eighty rods between sections seventeen and twenty in township ten, range thirty-two, all in Lincoln county and State of Nebraska, the above described road to be 66 ft. wide.

Any or all parties having objections thereto or claims for damages by reason of the establishment of the said above described road must file same in the office of the County Clerk of Lincoln County, Nebraska, on or before 12 o'clock noon of the 26th day of Feb. A. D. 1923.

Dated at North Platte, Neb., this 11th day of Nov. 1922.

A. S. ALLEN